



# Graduate Peer Mentoring Collaborative **PROJECT REPORT**

The Graduate Peer Mentoring Collaborative at North Carolina State University (NC State) consists of graduate students from the College of Humanities and Social Sciences, the College of Veterinary Medicine, and the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences.

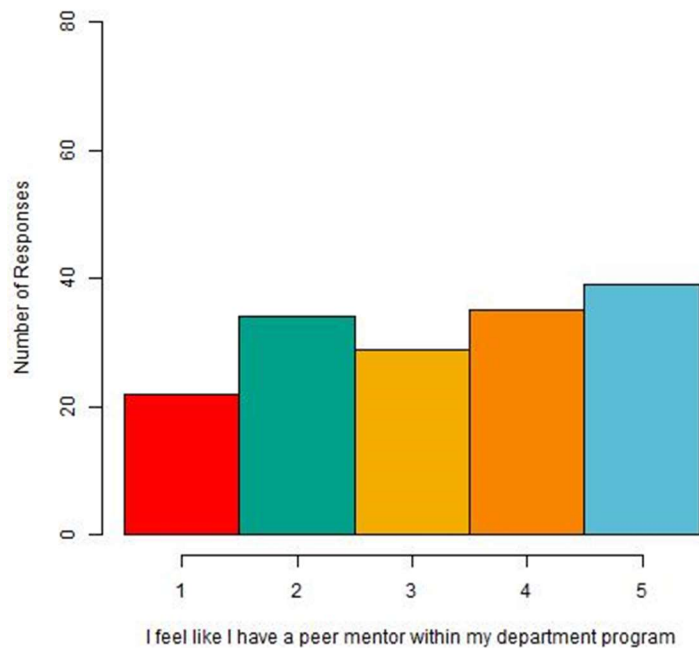
We are dedicated to supporting our fellow graduate students and learning about and enacting quality peer mentoring relationships.

**2017 – 2018 COHORT**  
**College of Humanities and Social Sciences**

## **Survey Overview**

We surveyed graduate students, both Master's and PhD students, from NC State College of Humanities and Social Sciences at the end of the Spring 2018 semester. There were 230 completed surveys (of the 745 total invitations sent out). We developed a 15-minute survey to assess the culture of peer mentoring that exists across the college. The goal was to gain a better understanding of what types of support systems are currently in place and whether there is a need for more or different types of mentoring methods. Data were collected on respondent demographics, satisfaction with current support systems, perceptions about departmental peer mentoring, situations in which the respondent provided and received mentoring, agreement with various statements about mentorship and dynamics within cohorts/departments, and areas in which respondents were willing to give more peer mentoring. A summary of some of the key takeaways from the survey results, as well as quotes from short answer responses, are displayed below.

## Peer Mentors



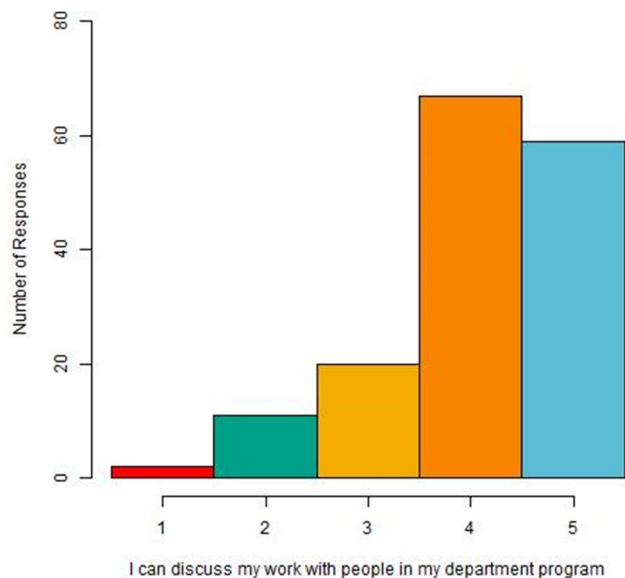
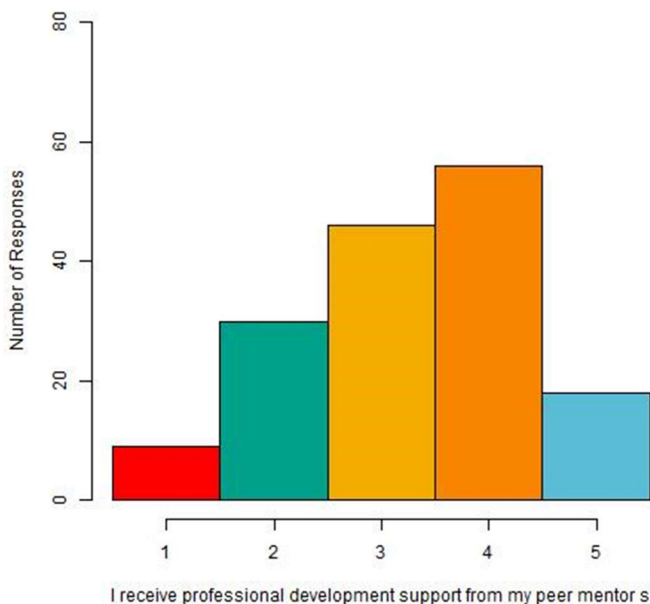
Regarding the results, CHASS graduate students are very split when it comes to whether they have a peer mentor in their department. Therefore, much more needs to be done in terms of facilitating peer mentoring relationships. This may be resolved by pairing students formally, or even by providing resources as to how to give and receive peer mentoring. For example, one respondent said, “I think having a more formalized structure for mentoring may be helpful, as students get further along in the program they tend to work elsewhere and are around less, and I think having a common time to all meet, or at least meet with one other student consistently who is at a different point in the program, would be tremendously useful.” Yet there is also value in promotion of informal pairings: “We have a formal program where we are paired with a 2nd year student, and I have used that to ask for advice on classes. However, the informal connections I've made have been a bit more helpful.”

This quote also brings up the topic of presence and the role this plays in peer mentoring. “From my perspective, though, the common connection in

mentoring seems to involve being present.” For instance, “The most consistent peer mentoring comes from colleagues working in a shared work space... These spaces also facilitate social support systems; people begin to be able to recognize when one of their peers is upset or stressed, and then can reach out to them.” This may be another potential way to foster peer mentoring: through teaching students to recognize how to serve as a peer mentor informally.

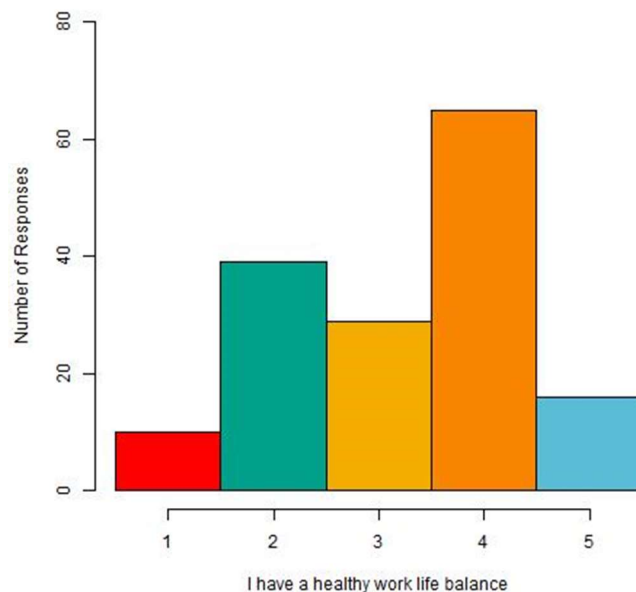
Finally, what do peer mentors do? “From conversation with others, peer mentors are there to help guide through the bureaucracy of school, provide emotional support/serve as a friend, and give advice on classes and study tips...” Also, “Peers mentor one another by giving insight into different ways to tackle assignments, solve problems or simply get through the day,” as well as “...informal mentoring where students share ways to cope and succeed, and just generally offer emotional support.” These are some of the reasons why it is important to work on having higher numbers of graduate students report they have a peer mentor.

### Professional & Academic Needs

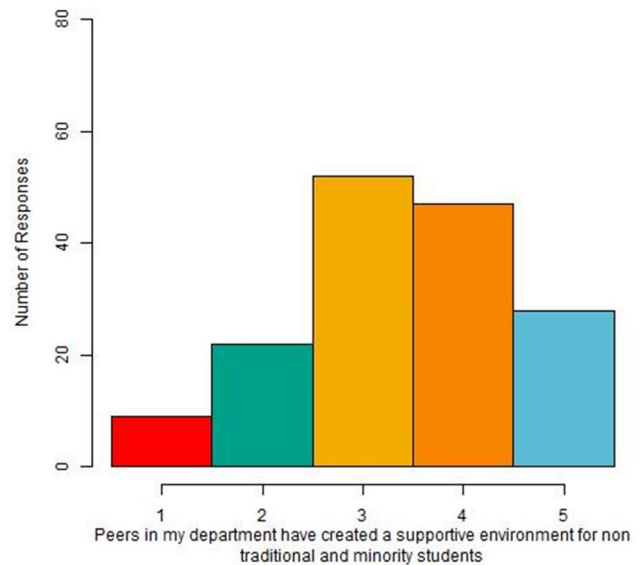
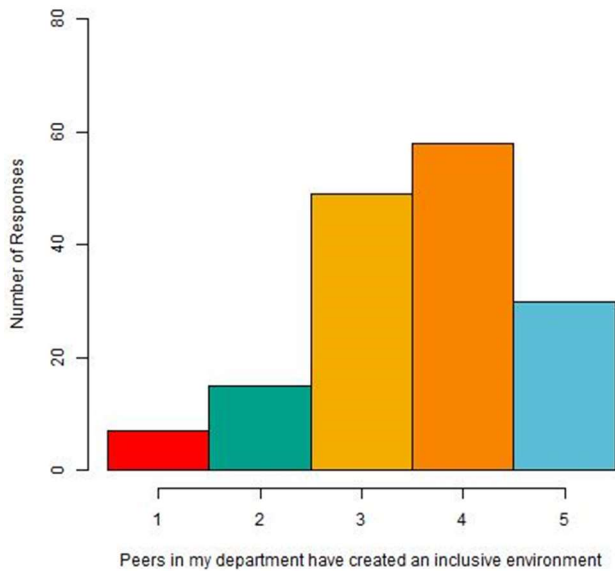


We seem to be doing well when it comes to meeting professional and academic needs. For example, high levels of students said they received professional development support from their peers. Also, those reporting they can discuss work with their peers was similarly high. “The few of us that stay in contact with each other outside of school make sure that we support one another. The main thing that we do is support one another and ensure that we provide resources.” Another instance of the importance of discussing work was: “One of the best examples of peer support that was unique to my experience I think was my capstone group. It was not required for us to work together, but the three of us who had a shared mentor decided to have biweekly checkins as a group, where we would discuss each person's work that had been shared and reviewed by the group a few days before meeting. This took place throughout the entire final semester, and honestly was one of the best experiences I had working with my peers. It helped keep us accountable for getting the capstone written, it helped us see how others were writing and what could also work for our own projects, and the outside feedback from a peer who was still somewhat familiar with the project was consistently useful.” This demonstrates the value a student felt in having others to speak to about their work.

## Socio-Emotional Needs



More work needs to be done when it comes to meeting the socio-emotional needs of CHASS graduate students. There were mostly negative results on whether students have a healthy work-life balance. For example, “It is hard to find life/work balance while in my program, let alone find "time" to effectively mentor peers. The program itself (the way it is set up), hinders peer mentoring among students--i.e., we're all too stressed or worried about ourselves to effectively help others.”



There are mixed findings in terms of the creation of an inclusive environment by graduate students. A good amount of students report that their peers have created an inclusive environment, but a concerning amount are indifferent on this question (although it is encouraging that relatively small numbers disagree). The number disagreeing also increases when asked specifically about the creation of a supportive environment for non-traditional students and minorities. This indicates that there is still work to do in terms of creating a culture of inclusion at the peer level when it comes to creating an inclusive environment, especially when it comes to making non-traditional students and minority students supported and included.

For example, one response called for “More inclusivity for racial, gender, sexual minorities.” Further, “Making it a more inclusive environment for minority students such as having more minority students in each program, trying to dispel certain stereotypes attributed to certain stereotypes, and encouraging professors to include minority perspectives in coursework.” Finally, related to part time and non-traditional students, “Part time students are frequently on the edge of the collegial experience. They can be intimidated and feel bewildered about the steps in the program, the fees and dates, the requirements towards theses and dissertations.” Also, “Peer mentoring is hard for students who are commuters; there needs to be some sort of practice in place that takes into consideration how peer/mentor relationships are changing with the emergence of new media channels,” and “I’m a part-time, non-traditional student and it’s tough for me to engage with my peers on any kind of regular basis. It’s unfortunate.” This final quote ties back to the point made above about peer mentoring requiring showing up.

## **Conclusion**

There are mixed results in terms of graduate students in the College of Humanities and Social Sciences already having peer mentors, so there may be some work to do there. We are doing well at meeting professional and academic needs. There is still work to do when it comes to meeting socio-emotional needs, though. Overall, there is a clear role for the Graduate Peer Mentoring Collaborative to focus on fostering peer mentor relationships and meeting socio-emotional needs through future projects.